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City of
BRADFORD
METROPOLITAN DISTRICT COUNCIL

Emotionally Based School Avoidance: Project Update

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Bradford Educational Psychology Team

National and Local Context



Working together to improve school attendance

Guidance for maintained schools, academies, independent schools, and local authorities

Published: May 2022

Applies from: September 2022

'Too many missing out on school' as absenteeism now three times higher than pre-pandemic levels

‘Children are holding a mirror up to us’: why are England’s kids refusing to go to school?

News > UK

Children refusing to go to school a big issue for parents, says charity

Parents and carers struggling with the issue of school refusal said Covid-19 lockdowns had an impact on their children, Action For Children found.

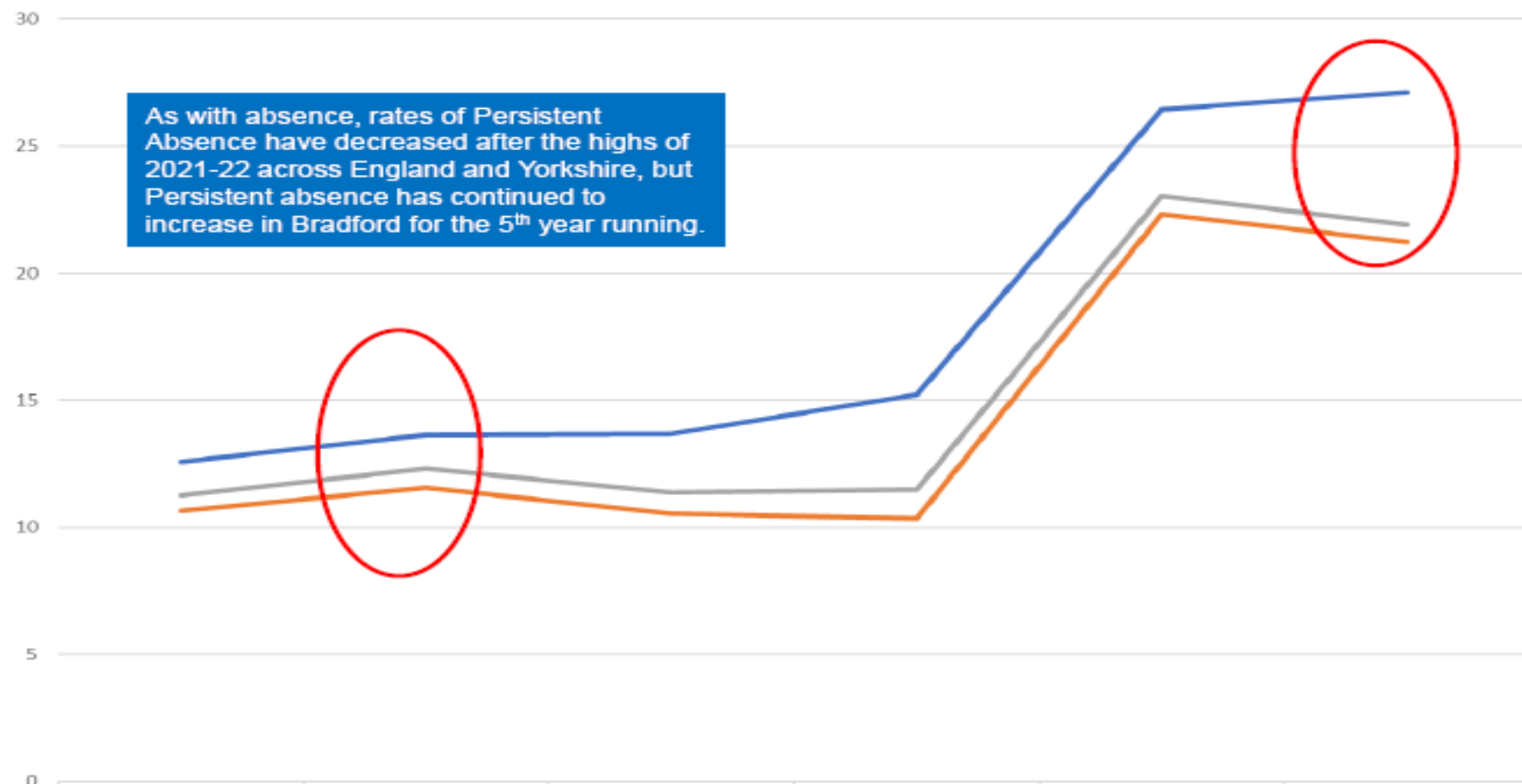
Aine Fox • Tuesday 24 October 2023 00:01 BST



Total Persistent Pupil Absence - Autumn/Spring 2016-17 to 2022-23

As with absence, rates of Persistent Absence have decreased after the highs of 2021-22 across England and Yorkshire, but Persistent absence has continued to increase in Bradford for the 5th year running.

%



	201617	201718	201819	202021	202122	202223
Bradford	12.58459	13.64625	13.66865	15.23405	26.44976	27.12306
England	10.67026	11.5724	10.53289	10.36047	22.31867	21.23249
Yorkshire and The Humber	11.27269	12.31761	11.38323	11.48474	23.02377	21.92138

Total Severe Pupil Absence - Autumn/Spring 2016-17 to 2022-23



EBSA and Attendance

- Not all students with persistent and severe absence will be within this group
- Specific group who are struggling with attendance due to emotion based factors
- UK literature pre-pandemic: 1-2% of students but higher in secondary schools
- It is difficult to know the exact number due to codes for recording attendance.
- Awaiting school survey feedback for a snapshot of estimates from schools

Project Strands

- Get baseline information on EBSA within the local context
- Produce guidance and a toolkit for schools to support identification and intervention processes for students with EBSA
- Create a clear pathway and graduated response in relation to students experiencing EBSA
- Provide training to schools on EBSA
- Work with pilot schools to provide implementation support and a targetted support offer (consultation basis)
- Outcomes of pilot to inform proposals on wider offer to schools
- Expansion of EEWBP team to include specific worker for EBSA support

Key Principles of Guidance and LA Strategic Response

Based around key principles from evidence

- Early intervention
- Systemic working: working with families, school staff and the young person
- Formulating and intervening according to individual case presentation
- Emphasis on the need for a rapid return to the educational setting alongside intervention, support and adaptations with the school and home environment

Baker and Bishop 2015

What is EBSA?



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‘A broad umbrella term used to describe a group of children and young people who have severe difficulty in attending school due to emotional factors, often resulting in prolonged absences from school’

West Sussex Educational Psychology Service

Language Use



School refuser



Fine in school



Controlling



It's the parent

Identifying EBSA



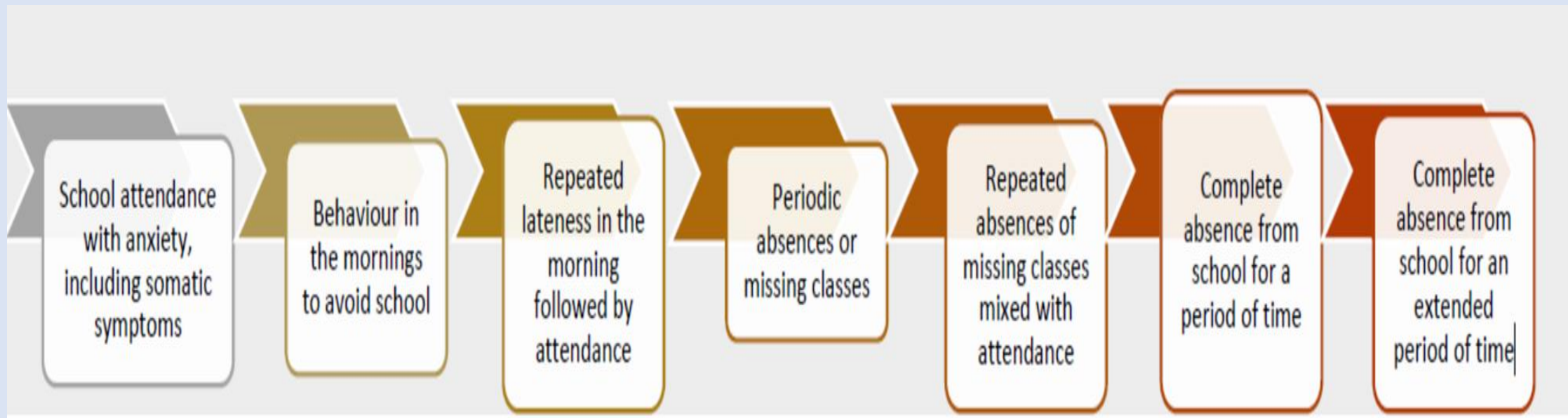
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What does this look like in your schools?

Identifying EBSA



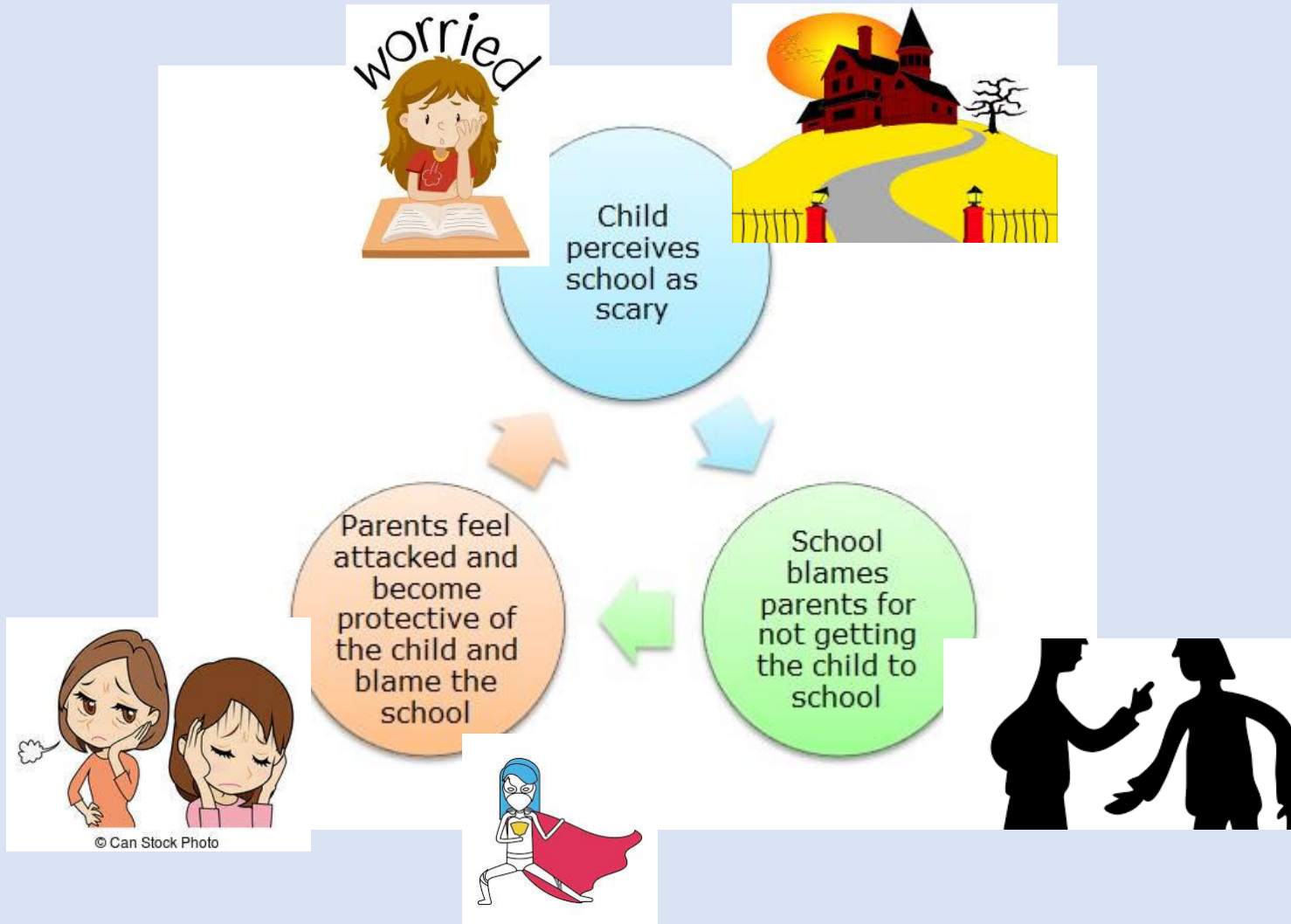
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Do you recognise this cycle?



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B
11 years old
ASD

This school is ruining my life.
I am angry all the time and it's really
frustrating. When I'm in the school
I am trapped. If I ask to get out
of class they just tell me to do
deep breathing and that makes me
have a panic attack. Because I
mask, they ~~don't~~ think I am
fine in the school. THEY
ARE DOING NOTHING.
If I go in all the time, I
just come out.



Emily, exhausted
after a day at
school x

This is how Emily feels
following a meltdown due
to sensory overload at
school.

This has happened most
days for the past 3 years.

Some days, Emily cannot
make it into school at all

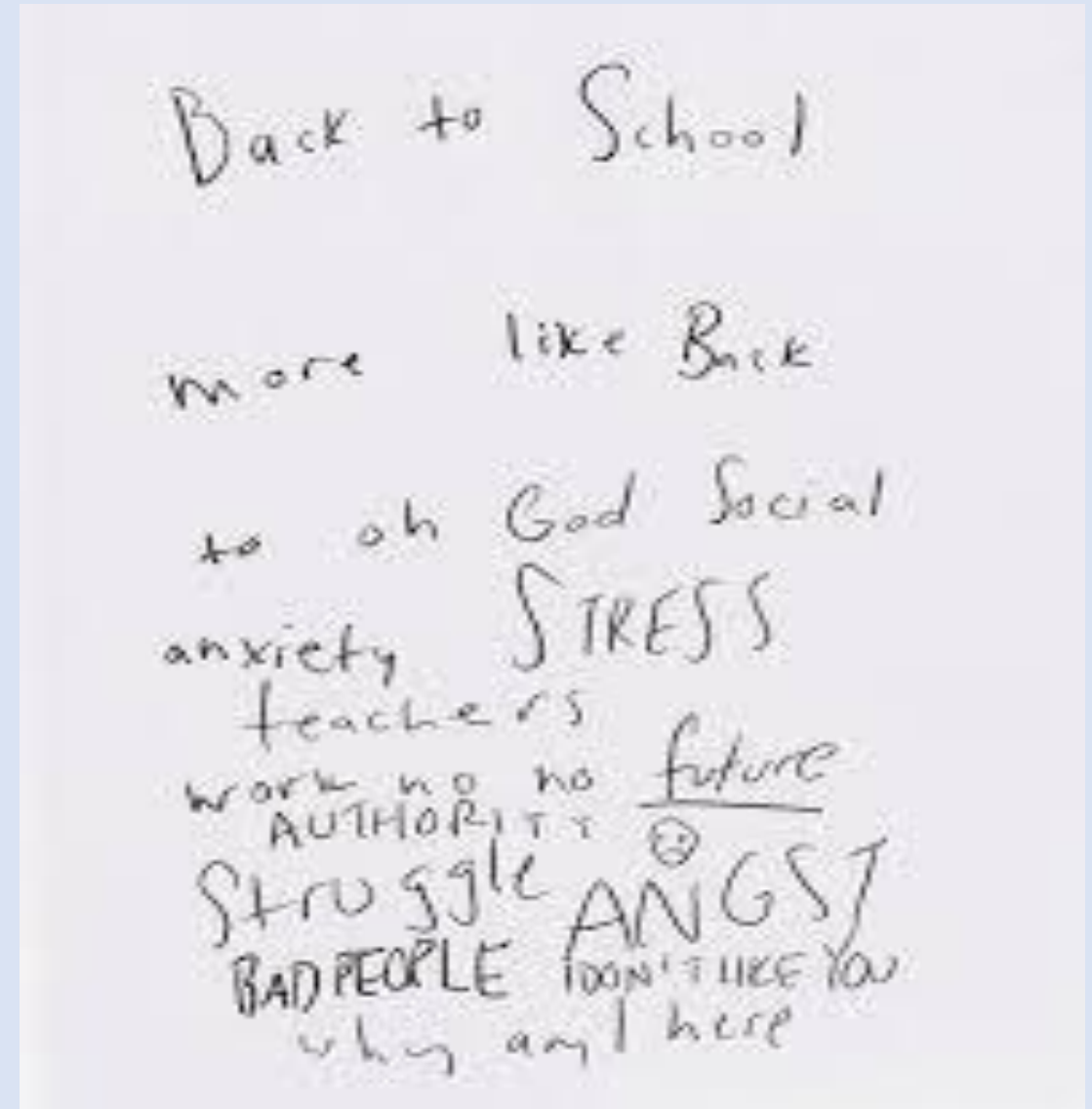
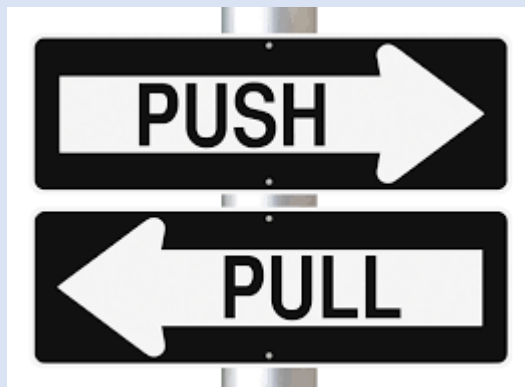
Depiction of the school situation by a 13 year old
who's been waiting for an autism assessment in
Calderdale for 2 years, and has been struggling to
attend school for the past 4 - 5 years.
She wants an education and to have friendships
but cannot bare to be in the sensory hell of
mainstream classes and is unable to navigate the
social aspect without suffering extreme anxiety
and 'autistic burnout'.
#notfineinschool



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“School refusal occurs when stress exceeds support, when risks are greater than resilience and when ‘pull factors’ that promote school non-attendance overcome the ‘push’ factors that encourage attendance.”

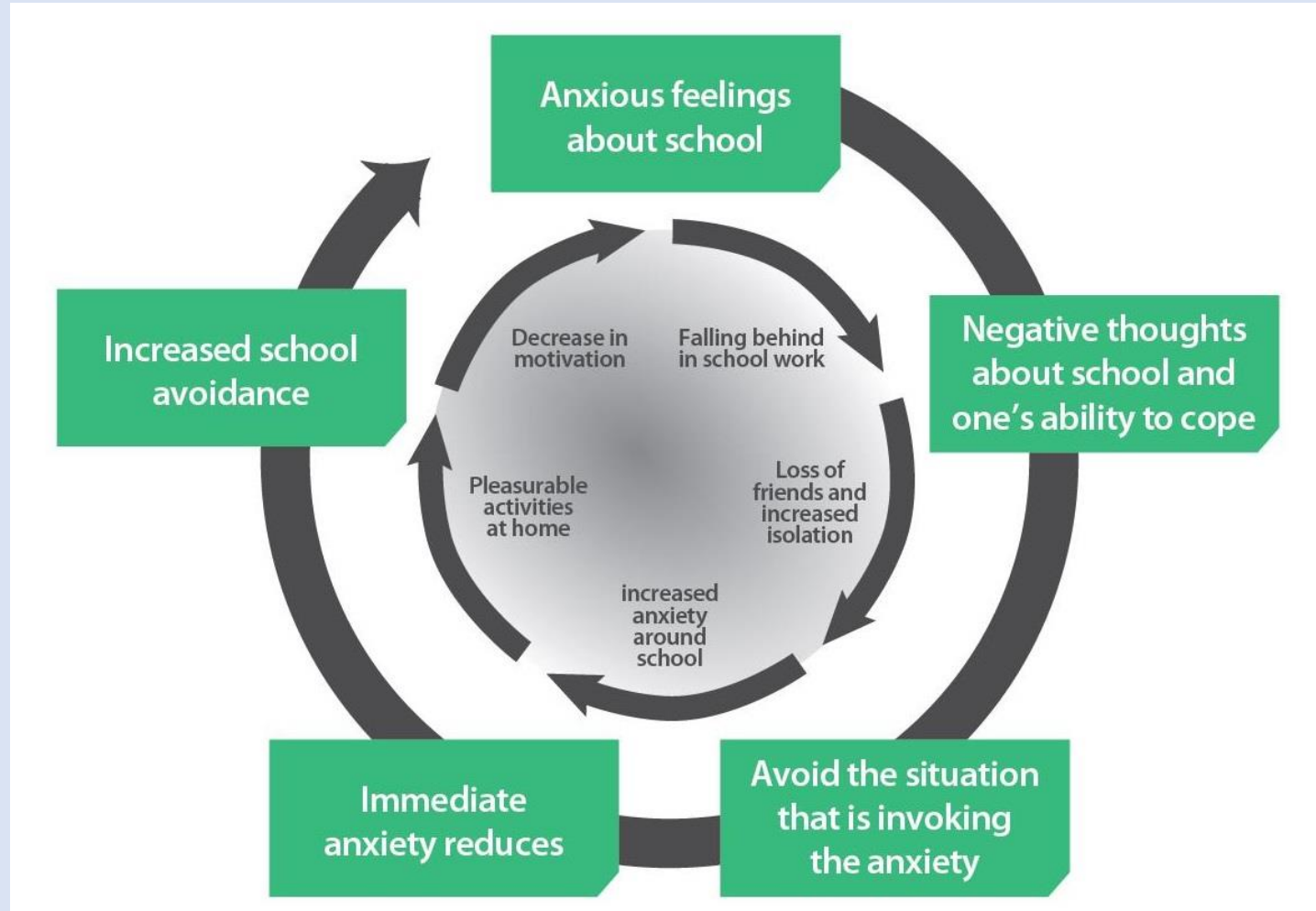
Thambirajah et al 2008



Anxiety and EBSA



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Collaborative Working





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Who do you involve?



Intervention and strategies – general strategies

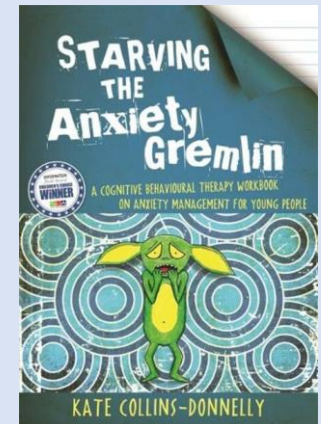
- Return to school at earliest opportunity
- Direct planned phonecall and contact
- Agreed plan with review date
- Early help/other agency referrals
- Predictable routines and consistent environment
- Sense of welcome and belonging
- Key adult/mentor – relational approaches



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Individualised Provision

- Peer relationships prioritised
- Engaging and meaningful curriculum offer
- Safe place
- Flexible application of attendance and behaviour policy
- Communication – staff, parents, student
- Pupil voice
- Psycho-education, graded exposure, ACT



Key Dates

- November - January – Gain views from school, parents and pupil focus groups
- By January – identify pilot schools
- **16th January – introduction to project at SENCo forum**
- **25th April – EBSA Spotlight Conference and Guidance Launch**
- April – August – Targetted support in pilot schools
- **6th June/25th June – EBSA Guidance: implementation training and workshop**
- September onwards – Training and implementation offer based on pilot feedback



What can I do now?

- Complete school survey
- Share survey with families (letter available)
- Start to think about how you identify and intervene with students experiencing EBSA
- Identify one target pupil and work with the family and student to explore the nature of the difficulties and plan an intervention
- Sign up for updates via email to victoria.morris@bradford.gov.uk



